

Scamsters Beware

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By JO2 Adrian Melendez - Navy Compass

California Takes Care of Service Members

SAN DIEGO - The California Department of Corporations held a press conference, July 14, announcing the new state program, Troops Against Predatory Scams (TAPS), at pier 2 aboard Naval Base San Diego. The program's goal is to educate California's service members on how to avoid becoming a victim of financial fraud as well as assist in the prosecution of businesses taking advantage of troops by illegal means.

"I am very confident that this initiative is going to lead to greater awareness on the part of our sailors," said Rear Adm. Jose Betancourt, commander, Navy Region Southwest.

Wayne Strumpfer, acting California Department of Corporation's commissioner, said it will take three weapons to achieve that goal TAPS is aiming for.

The first weapon in the TAPS arsenal is financial education.

"This will help you make smart decisions when it comes to your money. Scam artists are always coming up with a new plan," said Strumpfer.

The second tool is the aggressive enforcement of those businesses that have taken advantage of service members.

"Whether you're in the military or not, what we see a lot is people afraid to come forward after they have been duped. That it's a horrible thing because you feel ashamed, embarrassed or worried about what that might mean to your career if you get into financial difficulty," Strumpfer said. "We want you to understand that when a mistake is made the only way to correct it is to come forward. We will go after these people who come after you."

The final weapon is the cooperation between the state of California and the Department of Defense to share information on scams and put out the necessary information service members need to ultimately help prevent them from getting in financial trouble.

"I want to make sure that we give the individual sailor, and the Navy family, the opportunity to make informed decisions on what they do with their money," said Betancourt.

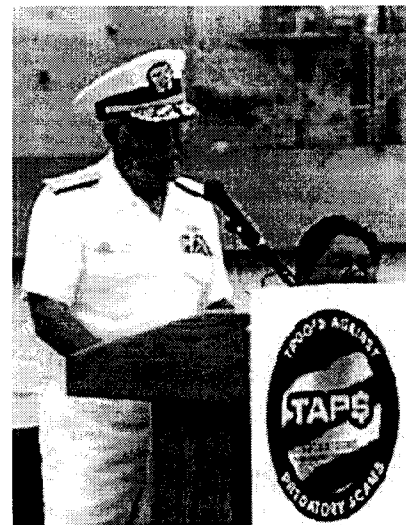
TAPS, and the state of California, want to make sure service members are aware that they are not alone when they feel they have been taken advantage of.

"We want to arm all of you with the tools to know what financial services are available and to ensure you know what you can do to guard yourself against any predatory scam," said Sunne Wright McPeak, secretary for the California Business, Transportation and Housing Agency. "We want to ensure that as you are serving your country we are serving you."

Some of the Sailors attending thought that the program was a great step in the war to protect troops against being ripped off.

"I definitely support and believe in this program," said Quartermaster 1st Class (SW) Michael McIntire, stationed at Naval Base San Diego. "I think the word does need to be put out to a lot more troops."

McIntire also said that even though TAPS is a great program for America's fighting force, it is ultimately up to the leadership in commands to make sure service members are informed on the financial programs that are available and up to the individual to take responsibility and make the right financial decision.



Rear Adm. Jose Betancourt praises the Troops Against Predatory Scams (TAPS) program, during a press conference that kicked off the program, July 14, aboard Naval Base San Diego. TAPS is a California state program that aims at financially educating service members and protecting them from being scammed. Official U.S. Navy photo by JO2 Adrian Melendez